

## Three alternatives for California's water problems

By Dr. Marcia E. Sablan

On April 22, our community will have an opportunity to weigh in on three proposed solutions to the environmental and water management problems of the Bay-Delta system. These proposals will greatly affect the agricultural future of the San Joaquin Valley.

This public hearing, which officially begins at 7 p.m. with an informal Question and Answer session at 6 p.m., will be held at the Ramada Inn in Fresno. The public will have the opportunity to meet with staff members from the CALFED program who will outline and accept comments on this water management plan, which greatly affects the agricultural future in the San Joaquin Valley.

The San Francisco Bay/Sacramento Delta is the focus of the CALFED program. Most of the San Joaquin Valley irrigation water comes from the Sierra Nevadas, Lake Shasta, etc., and flows to the Bay-Delta. Water is pumped from this area for irrigation and other uses in Southern California.

As a result of a decades long struggle among various competing interests, today the Bay Delta system is on the brink of failure. How do we in California obtain a reliable and economical agricultural water source, and at the same time protect our natural resources, fish-

eries, drinking water and wildlife? The CALFED Program presents both benefits and adverse inputs for agriculture. New storage facilities could increase the amount of water available for agricultural production. Conversely, the program could lead to conversion of agricultural land and its associated water supply.

Technical experts from state and federal agencies, along with a federally chartered public advisory committee representing the Bay-Delta's diverse interests, have established the foundation for a Bay-Delta solution. This foundation calls for all the Bay-Delta interests; environmental, agricultural and urban; to develop an equitable, durable and affordable consensus solution that reduces conflicts in the system. The CALFED program principles also prohibit a solution that would better one part of the problem by worsening another.

Public input throughout the program has come in various forms: a federally chartered public advisory group, public meetings, workshops, thousands of mailings and a website have all been utilized to gauge public concerns and suggestions. Such input has helped shape the manner in which policy makers develop a solution. However, the real need for public input is about to begin.

On March 16, the CALFED

Bay-Delta Program released a draft programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report identifying three potential Bay-Delta solutions. Each of the three alternatives for a Bay-Delta solution contains major programs to address water use efficiency, ecosystem restoration, watershed management, levee system integrity, water transfers and water quality. The alternatives differ primarily in how they would move and store water in the system. All of them propose an increase in water storage.

Finding the best solution is not an easy task, but it is imperative. The first step is to ensure that the people this decision will impact are aware of the alternatives and let their views be known. If you drink water, eat fruits and vegetables, care about the environment or depend on a strong California economy, then you depend on the Bay-Delta. You have a historic opportunity to get involved. Don't let it pass you by.

The public hearings will be held in Fresno on April 22 at the Ramada Inn on 324 E. Shaw Ave. The hearing begins at 7 p.m., with an informal Question and Answer session preceding at 6 p.m. Information relevant to CALFED and the Bay-Delta is available to the public by calling 1-800-900-3587 or logging on to <http://calfed.ca.gov>.

*Dr. Sablan is mayor of Firebaugh and member of the Bay-Delta Advisory Council.*